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thecolleg

INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

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TIPOFF

8 p.m. @ Bramlage Coliseum

Big 12 race comes down to three major contenders



Emily DeShazer | Collegian

The team watches coach Bruce Weber draw up a play during a timeout on Saturday in Bramlage Coliseum. The Wildcats remain in a three-way tie for first in the Big 12 Conference after a win over Baylor and hope to remain there after tonight's game against West Virginia.



Adam Suderman

With a six-game schedule remaining in conference play, Big 12 men's basketball is the scene of an unexpectedly tight race. A three-way tie currently exists between Kansas, winner of eight-straight Big 12 titles, K-State and Oklahoma State.

Could any of these teams drop in the conference rankings? Yes. In fact, each team has shown itself capable of hitting a drought. With a two-game gap now sitting in between the three leaders and the other seven teams in the Big 12, a closing of the gap seems less likely.

Sitting with five conference losses, the ankle-biters Baylor, Iowa State and Oklahoma can only hope the top three find ways to topple backward. Each of these teams has shown glaring deficiencies in recent play that provide plenty of reasons for skepticism.

Iowa State and Baylor rank as two of the most efficient offensive teams in the conference, if not the nation. Unfortunately for these two teams, offense

doesn't paint the full picture or automatically hand over a victory. With an inability to guard the paint, a team with a good post unit would be fully capable of consistently exploiting the Cyclones.

As proven in K-State's 81-61 win over the Bears on Saturday, holding on to the ball hasn't been an easy task for the folks from Waco. Their 19 turnovers won't win the Bears many games and point guard Pierre Jackson's ability to score is being offset by the senior's ball-handling woes.

With zero games remaining against the conference's top three, Oklahoma finds itself in the most peculiar of situations. Losing one of their top scoring threats in freshman guard Buddy Hield won't make the process any easier for the Sooners. An opportunity to pull out a victory in Stillwater fell through Oklahoma's fingers, and the Sooners can now only sit and hope for a few breaks in the final stretch of the conference season.

Has Kansas found its way out of the woes that brought a three-game losing streak just a few weeks ago? A Wednesday night matchup with the Cowboys in Stillwater will answer that question. After two strong performances within the confines of Allen Fieldhouse, it appears the Jayhawks have built themselves

back.

Of the top three teams, the Cowboys have the best opportunity to make noise and pave their way to a conference championship. Beating teams on the road has proven to be very difficult this season and getting to host both Kansas and K-State will give them an added advantage.

Sitting at 20-5 and 9-3 in conference games, K-State enters the final stretch as a team that carries significant potential. Following one of his strongest — if not the strongest — games of his career, sophomore point guard Angel Rodriguez continues to show just how capable he is of running the Wildcats' offense. With the ongoing emergence of junior guard/forward Shane Southwell, the Wildcats have developed yet another weapon for Rodriguez to feed through his trademark drives to the basket.

If there is anything that has been shown through the 2012-13 Big 12 Conference slate, it's that anything can happen on any given night. However, the likelihood of a team outside of the Sooner and Sunflower states winning the regular season conference championship has quickly diminished.

Adam Suderman is a junior in print journalism. Please send comments to sports@kstatecollegian.com.

By the numbers

Nicolas Wahl
staff writer

1 *The number of seasons Bob Huggins coached at K-State*

Huggins led the 2006-07 Wildcats to the NIT, the first postseason berth for the program since an NCAA run in 1996. Huggieville was short lived though, as Huggins went home to his alma mater West Virginia after just one season. Huggins returns tonight to Bramlage Coliseum.

1.54 *K-State's assist to turnover ratio on the season*

K-State's assist to turnover ratio is top in the Big 12 this season, but West Virginia is second in the conference at turning opponents over, taking

the ball away an average of 14.3 times per game in conference play in 2012-13.

23 *The number of K-State wins during the only season that Huggins was at the Wildcats' helm*

K-State head coach Bruce Weber has led the Wildcats to a 20-5 record thus far this season. A win over West Virginia would give K-State 21 on the year and leave Weber just two shy of Huggins' record for a first-year head coach.

36.3 *West Virginia's offensive rebounding percentage*

K-State is top in the conference in overall offensive rebound percentage this season at 37.9 percent, but if the Wildcats

are to be successful, an advantage on the offensive boards is critical. The Wildcats were beaten on the offensive boards in each of their five losses this season, and any team coached by Huggins understands how to attack the offensive glass.

39.4 *K-State's shooting percentage from 3-point range this season*

The Wildcats lead the Big 12 in 3-point shooting this year, and are coming off of back-to-back impressive performances from deep. K-State has gone 19-of-44 for just over 43 percent in their most recent games against Kansas and Baylor. The Mountaineers are middle of the road in the Big 12, giving up 34 percent 3-point shooting against Big 12 opponents this season.



Emily DeShazer | Collegian

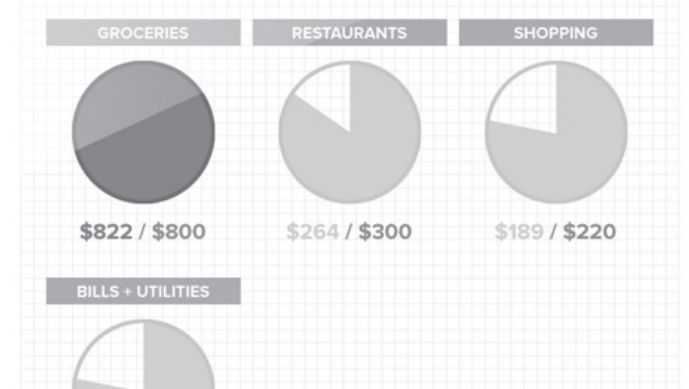
Reaching to put a rebound back up, senior forward **Jordan Henriquez** adds a basket during his double-double on Saturday at Bramlage Coliseum. The Wildcats lead the Big 12 Conference in offensive rebounding percentage at 37.9, but West Virginia is close behind with 36.3 percent.

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3-pointers, defense keys to K-State's success on the court this season

John Zetmeir
staff writer

Bruce Weber said it himself in his first press conference as K-State head coach: when the Wildcats have the ball, they are going to be high tempo and shoot a lot of threes. This season, K-State has typically found success in games when they have had a strong performance behind the arc. This trend continued on Saturday night, as K-State went 11-of-25 from long range. Baylor was not too far off from the Wildcats, finishing 8-of-21.

It was a two-man firing squad for the Wildcats from behind the arc as sophomore guard Angel Rodriguez and junior guard Shane Southwell combined to go 9-of-17 from downtown. Southwell started the season hot from long range, but saw his numbers take a dip in the last six games prior to Baylor.

"Lately I haven't been following through, so coach told me in shoot around to do one-hand form shooting, and I did it again later in shoot around before the game started and it worked," Southwell said.

Southwell is currently ranked third in the Big 12 in 3-point percentage, shooting nearly 45 percent. In the Wildcats' last two wins, the team is shooting an average of 47 percent from 3-point range.

K-State is ranked second in the Big 12 in 3-point percentage at 36.2 percent, and has already tallied up 461 shots from behind the arc. Last season, under head coach Frank Martin, the Wildcats shot 33.5 percent from long range, connecting on 183 shots. K-State is 16 3-pointers away from tying last year's total mark with six regular season games left to play, not including tournament time.

The three ball has been a factor in every big win K-State has gotten this season. Against then-No. 8 Florida, K-State shot 41.2 percent from outside, scoring on 7-of-17 attempts. Two weeks later, in the Big 12 opener against then-No. 22 Oklahoma State, K-State scored 7-of-21.

K-State has played six conference home games this season with a record of 5-1. In the five wins, the Wildcats are shooting an average of 41.7 percent. In the lone loss to Kansas, the Wildcats jacked up 30 threes,



Emily DeShazer | Collegian

Junior forward **Shane Southwell** yells to celebrate after sinking another 3-pointer in Saturday's game at Bramlage Coliseum. Southwell ended the game with 18 points after hitting six 3-pointers in the 81-61 win over Baylor.

connecting on only nine. They lost to Kansas by 4 points.

The second part of the equation has been the Wildcats' defense. In their nine conference

wins, K-State is beating teams by an average of 10.4 points. Two of the Wildcats' three losses have come by 6 points or less. Their defense has put the Wildcats

in a position to win just about every game they've played, but it comes down to scoring and, most importantly, hitting the outside shot.

Huggins returns for first time since 2007 departure to West Virginia

John Zetmeir
staff writer

It's the game K-State fans have been waiting for: West Virginia head coach Bob Huggins will return to Bramlage Coliseum for the first time since leaving K-State to take a job at West Virginia after the 2006-07 season — his lone season as head of the Wildcats. It was Huggins who jump-started the K-State program, bringing in players like Bill Walker, Michael Beasley, Jacob Pullen and Dominique Sutton.

The Wildcats come into the game trying to stay at the top of the Big 12 Conference in the midst of a three-way tie with Kansas and Oklahoma State. The

Mountaineers, on the other hand, are playing for pride and maybe an NIT bid. However, records do not reflect how tight this matchup could be.

In their last meeting, K-State depended on junior guard Shane Southwell to put the nail in the coffin. The Wildcats trailed 63-64 with 21 seconds left when Southwell stepped to the free-throw line, hitting both free throws. He then blocked West Virginia sophomore guard Gary Browne's layup with time expiring to seal the deal. Both Southwell and senior guard Rodney McGruder finished with a team-high 17 points.

"They are very physical; they crash the boards very

well," Southwell said of West Virginia. "It's going to be a tough physical game. We've just got to use our crowd the same way they used their crowd to make shots. It gave them a boost in a way, and we've just got to use our crowd to get that boost."

In last season's meeting, West Virginia handed the Wildcats their first defeat of the season in a double-overtime thriller in Wichita. When these two teams meet, it is bound to be a close contest.

"They are very physical there is no doubt about it. They have great quickness; they have some inside presence. It's a fine line. We have to be rested and fresh, but we have to be prepared,"

said K-State head coach Bruce Weber. "Big Monday, great crowd, great opportunity to play a little better than a week ago."

This will be K-State's second-straight week playing as part of ESPN's "Big Monday." Last week, the Wildcats did not fair well, as they went into Allen Fieldhouse and suffered their worst defeat of the season. However, the Wildcats will have the home court advantage this week.

In the first matchup, both teams played almost identical games. What it came down to was the little things for K-State. The Wildcats only grabbed one more offensive rebound and tallied eight steals.

Although the Wildcats

had 10 more total fouls than the Mountaineers, West Virginia was unable to capitalize from the charity stripe. Going a meager 12-for-22, the Mountaineers left a lot of points off of the board with their poor free-throw shooting. They were able to shoot 50 percent from behind the arc, but only attempted eight threes.

West Virginia has yet to win a conference game against a team with a winning record, and this will be one of their toughest trips of the season.



courtesy photo

West Virginia head coach **Bob Huggins** left K-State in 2007 after only one season as the Wildcats' head coach.

Mountaineers bring rugged style to Manhattan



Mark Kern

West Virginia's resume really does not stick out that much, as the Mountaineers are only 13-12 overall and 6-6 in the Big 12 Conference, just a game over .500. However, when you dig a little deeper you start to see a team that can give other teams fits.

West Virginia does not have that one guy who can go out and get 20-25 points on any given night. Yet while they lack that guy, they do have as much balance as any team in the Big 12, with seven players averaging at least 6.6 points per game.

The Mountaineers' top scorer is freshman guard Eron Harris, who leads the team with 9.2 points. In the last 10 games, though, Harris has taken it to another level by averaging 14.4 points. In his rapid improvement, Harris has shown that he might just become that guy capable of getting 20 points a night in the future.

While the Mountaineers do

not do a great job of scoring, one thing they do well is turning the game into a physical brand of basketball.

Coming from the Big East, which is known for its very physical style, the Mountaineers are like no other team in the Big 12. The rest of the Big 12 plays more of an up-tempo, crisp style of basketball — the complete opposite of West Virginia.

Even in their losses, West Virginia has done a great job of controlling the tempo of the game, as evidenced in the Wildcats' 65-64 victory over the Mountaineers on Jan. 12 in Morgantown, W.Va.

They do a very good job of making the other team work for everything it can get on the offensive end of the court, and are going to battle for the entire 40 minutes.

The inside duo of West Virginia seniors Aaric Murray and Deniz Kilicli is one of the toughest in all of the Big 12. While they are not the most talented players out there, they are going to play an extremely physical game in the paint and try to wear the other team out.

K-State fans know exactly what to expect from a Bob Huggins coached team. They

STYLE | pg. T4



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STYLE | Expect physical, high-speed game tonight

Continued from page T3

are going to play hard for 40 minutes, and force the Wildcats to go out there and play their best to win.

These two teams have played twice in the past two seasons, each team winning one game

with only 4 points separating the two teams. Look for another hard-fought game in Bramlage tonight, as that is just what Bob Huggins' teams do.

Mark Kern is a senior in print journalism. Please send comments to sports@kstatecollegian.com.

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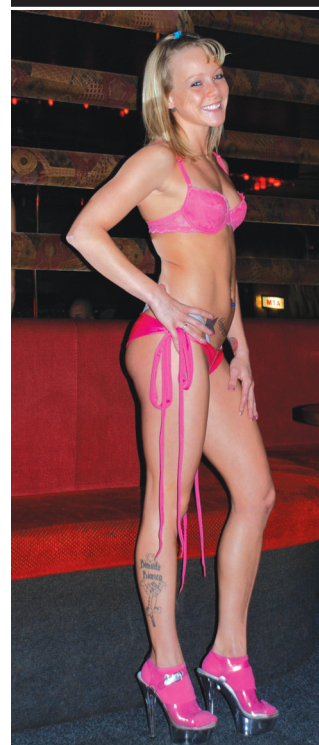
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